

WOMEN & LAND

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Rural
Development
Institute

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Overview

When women own property and control assets, they are better positioned to improve the lives of their families and themselves. Unfortunately, women in many countries do not have secure property rights, a key tool to gaining economic security. Women represent over 50 percent of the world's population and do 60-80 percent of the agricultural production in developing countries, yet they own less than 2 percent of the world's land.

Why Women's Secure Rights to Land Are Critical

Women's secure rights to land can reduce poverty and increase food production.

▶ Secure land rights help women increase food security and help provide better nutrition for their families. Income from women's secure land rights can improve child welfare, especially for girls.

Women's secure land rights can provide security and protection for the most vulnerable.

▶ Women without assets are vulnerable if their husbands die, abandon them, take other wives, or if the marriage breaks down. Girls are often vulnerable, dependant on others for their well being due to discriminatory inheritance practices.

▶ When women and girls have secure rights to land and housing, they are less likely to suffer from physical or sexual violence.

▶ Women are affected disproportionately by forced evictions and more likely to become landless and homeless.

▶ The number of female-headed households is rising due to male migration, desertion, divorce, and death from HIV-AIDS.

Secure land rights further women's empowerment by:

▶ Enabling women to exercise their human rights to shelter, dignity and liberty.

▶ Empowering women economically, reducing their dependence and enhancing their self-determination.

▶ Strengthening women's bargaining power in their homes and communities and improving their status.

When women have secure land rights, children are more likely to prosper.

▶ Studies show that assets in the hands of women are more likely to be invested in their children and families, resulting in opportunities for education, better nutrition and improved health care.

▶ With secure land rights, women are better able to use micro-credit to invest in their land, creating income and savings to protect against shocks such as natural disasters, illness or death.

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Current Initiatives

RDI works to strengthen women's rights to land through its Women and Land Program, which focuses on the specific interests and needs of rural women by developing tailored solutions that address those interests and needs through laws, policies and education.

► **Rwanda:** Women comprise more than half of Rwanda's population. Over 30 percent of households are headed by women, one of the highest rates in the world. RDI is assisting the Rwandan government with implementation of its new land law, including consideration of gender issues and coordination of a Women's Law and Policy Task Force to provide continuing input on laws from a gender perspective.

► **Burundi:** In this post-conflict environment, women's rights to land are even more precarious given the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons placing multiple claims on the land from which they fled during the conflict. RDI has been working with the government and local NGOs to promote women's land rights as the country deliberates on draft land and inheritance laws.

► **China:** In addition to strengthening women's land rights under China's new land law, RDI provides training for legal aid lawyers on the protection of rural women's land rights.

► **India:** RDI is securing women's land rights through "micro-ownership" of land titled in women's names, and holds state level policy workshops on woman's land rights to improve legal literacy.

► **Indonesia:** RDI is working with a local NGO to study women's roles in micro-plot production in Java.

Selected Accomplishments

► **Strengthening Women's Land Rights in India:** In India, RDI is collaborating with the states of Karnataka, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh to initiate new programs to provide micro-plots to roughly 11 million people, ensuring that women receive legal rights to the land.

► **Rwandan Women's Law and Policy**

Task Force: This Task Force—a collective of indigenous grassroots women's organizations—grew out of an RDI-sponsored workshop. Their mission is to provide input and advocacy on Rwandan laws and policies with the goal of promoting women's rights.

► **Women's Rights to Market Gardens in Mali:**

RDI attorney Leonard Rolfes, working part-time for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), has played an instrumental role in designing a large irrigation project with a special allocation of land to women for market gardening—an important way for women to control land and gain nutritional benefits.

► **Angola:** During the formalization of land rights in Angola, RDI advocated to incorporate gender-sensitive procedures and include women in that process, and helped to get their land rights recognized.

► **Ugandan Land Sector Analysis:** RDI attorney, Renée Giovarelli and a Ugandan lawyer conducted fieldwork to determine how land and agricultural reform has affected women's and orphan's access to land and housing, and provided recommendations and interventions to strengthen those rights.

► **Ford Foundation Project to Strengthen**

Women's Rights in China: In cooperation with the All China Women's Federation Rural Policy Research Center in Beijing, RDI conducted research and issued a report on legislative reforms to strengthen women's land rights.

► **Women's Customary Rights in Kyrgyzstan:**

RDI led a team of legal and social sciences researchers to determine how formal and customary laws affect women's rights to land, how local institutions enforce customary laws, and if this practice precludes women from exercising their rights to land and other assets.



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Global Center for Women's Land Rights

This year, RDI will launch the world's first Global Center for Women's Land Rights. The Center, based in Seattle, will expand RDI's current work by bringing together research, training, advocacy and education to improve women's land rights. Created at the Clinton Global Initiative, the Center will:

- Develop an e-library to connect practitioners around the world with a shared library of laws on women's land rights from countries throughout the world;
- Create a community of practice by developing a Fellowship Program to train and mentor professionals to become more knowledgeable about women's land rights and access;
- Assist other NGOs in adapting their existing programs to include opportunities to protect and improve women's access and rights to land.
- Advocate for women's secure land and property rights.